

T H E
North Central Association of
Colleges and Secondary Schools

*ITS NATURE, PURPOSES and
ACCOMPLISHMENT*

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THE NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

Its Nature, Purposes and Accomplishments.

BY HORACE A. HOLLISTER.

After fifteen years of active existence, during which time the annual proceedings have been regularly published, it seems that there is still considerable misapprehension as to the nature and function of this organization. To those who are familiar with its workings by participation this lack of generally disseminated information is not remarkable. For while the work of the association has often been intense it has never approached the noisy and, scarcely ever, the spectacular. It is distinctly a working body, dealing consistently with those problems set for itself as first constituted.

It is with the feeling that the success of the work which the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools has been called to undertake depends upon a wider knowledge of this work among those interested in education that this brief resumé of its character and work is presented. If any apology is due from the writer for such an undertaking it must be because this work has already been so well done by two of those who have served as presidents of the Association.* But the proceedings of these meetings are not widely circulated; hence the thought that a still wider publicity is needed.

In March, 1894, at a meeting of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club, a committee was appointed to investigate and report on the condition of secondary school work throughout the United States. In December of the same year a partial report was presented. This resulted in asking the presidents of the University of Michigan, the

*See President's address by G. N. Carman, Proc. 8th session, and F. L. Harris, Proc. of 10th session,

372
H 7277

University of Wisconsin, Northwestern University, and the University of Chicago to unite with a committee of the Club in issuing a call for a meeting to form an association of schools and colleges of the North Central States. This was done, and the first meeting convened on the 29th of March, 1895, at Northwestern University, for the purpose of establishing a permanent organization.

There were present at this meeting the representatives of leading universities, colleges and schools from Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa and Missouri. A permanent organization was provided for, and the first regular meeting of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools was set to convene in March, 1896, at the University of Chicago, with President James B. Angell of Michigan University as its first president.

At the very outset it was proposed to discuss such questions as "What Constitutes a Secondary School?" "What Constitutes a College?" The question of uniform requirements for admission to colleges also found an early hearing. In all these and ensuing discussions secondary and college men have mingled and participated freely. The Association has met annually at about the same time of year. All of the fifteen sessions except two have been held in Chicago. These exceptions are the fifth which met at St. Louis in 1900, and the seventh which met at Cleveland in 1902. Those who have served as presidents are: President James B. Angell, 1896; President James H. Canfield, 1898; Assistant Superintendent A. F. Nightingale, 1899; President William F. Slocum, 1900; Inspector George B. Aiton, 1901; Chancellor W. S. Chaplin, 1902; Director George N. Carman, 1903; President Andrew S. Draper, 1904; Principal F. L. Bliss, 1905; President George E. McLean, 1906; Principal E. L. Harris, 1907; President Edmund J. James, 1908; Principal E. W. Coy, 1909; Dean Calvin M. Woodward, 1910; Principal George W. Benton, President elect for 1911. It will be seen that the general policy has been to divide honors between the college and secondary men about equally. This has been true of other officers, as well as of all important assignments on programs or committees.

From the beginning there have been represented in the membership, both of institutions and individuals, the very best institutions, secondary and higher, public and private, of the North Central States. Probably no similar organization can show a group of stronger men and women, of those who have been among the leaders of the most important educational movement of their time.

Organized as a working body, the machinery of organization has been kept at a minimum, and petty politics, so often the bane of our American organizations, has, as yet, found no place here. Article II of the constitution as originally adopted reads: "The object of this Association shall be to establish closer relations between the colleges and the secondary schools of the North Central States." This is a plain and definite statement of a purpose which gave rise to the organization at the beginning, and which has been consistently adhered to in all the subsequent work of the Association.

At first the constitution provided that memberships, both institutional and individual, with reference to the two types of institutions, be kept as nearly equal in numbers as practicable. Later, as applications for membership increased, it appeared that those from Secondary Schools were much more numerous than those from Colleges and Universities. In 1908, the constitution was amended so as to remove all restriction on the number who might represent the Secondary Schools. At the session of 1910, the membership was as follows: Institutional members, Colleges and Universities, 57; Secondary Schools, 94. Individual members, Colleges and Universities, 35; Secondary Schools, 26; making a total institutional membership of 151, and 61 of individual members.

We have said that the original purpose of the Association has been adhered to throughout. If evidence of the correctness of this statement is needed it will readily appear in the record of the things undertaken and accomplished by this organization. Early in its history the Association set its approval upon the elective system in the secondary program, and accepted as its working principle the certificate plan of admission to college as based on inspection of Secondary Schools throughout the North Central group of states.

Article IV of the Constitution reads thus: "All the decisions of the Association bearing upon the policy and management of higher and secondary institutions are understood to be advisory in their character." Thus a voluntary association of representatives of the two types of institutions included has undertaken to discuss common interests with the view to eliminating differences, reducing friction, and avoiding the waste from duplication of efforts, without, in any way interfering with the rights and interests of individual institutions or the educational interests and methods of the individual states included in this representation.

Among the important things which have been undertaken by the Association are, first, to define college entrance requirements; that is, to point out the line of demarkation between colleges and secondary schools. To this end the secondary school has been defined as extending through four years' time, or thirty-six weeks, four or five days in each week, devoted to the study of a given subject.

It early became evident that it would be desirable to have the content of each unit defined also. To this end the Association has provided for the appointment of representative committees who undertake to formulate such content definitions for all the subjects presented in a modern secondary school, and also to revise these from time to time.

To Professor A. S. Whitney, of Michigan University, is due the credit for first urging uniformity of accrediting of secondary schools. A plan for harmonizing state inspections was presented by him at the sixth meeting in 1901. As a result, a committee, of which Dean S. A. Forbes, of the University of Illinois, was chairman, was appointed to formulate a plan. This committee reported later at the same meeting and their report led to the establishment of the Commission of Accredited Schools, since changed to the Commission on Accredited Schools and Colleges. This Commission was composed as follows: Six were to be appointed as representing the colleges and six as representing secondary schools, these to be named by the chair. In addition to these each college

or university having membership in the Association whose freshman class numbers at least fifty is entitled to one delegate representative on the Commission, and an equal number are appointed as representatives of the secondary schools.

A plan and rules for the joint accrediting of secondary schools was adopted at the next meeting and a Board of Inspectors provided for which makes its report directly to the Commission. Thus all rules and recommendations in regard to the accrediting of schools by the North Central Association are first discussed and formulated by this Board, then deliberated upon by the Commission as a whole before presentation for final adoption by the Association.

It is difficult to see how a better scheme for safeguarding the interests of all concerned in such accrediting could be devised. As a result of the careful and conservative manner in which this work is conducted the lists of schools thus accredited are coming to be recognized by most institutions both East and West.

More recently the accrediting of such colleges as may seek to be thus recognized has been proposed; but this has not yet passed beyond the preliminary stages. A committee of three for each state is provided for whose duty it will be to inspect all colleges making application for accrediting and to report to the Commission on Accredited Schools and Colleges. As yet no inspections have been made as the State Committees must await a report from a general committee of the Commission appointed to formulate standards for reports from colleges applying for inspection, such reports to be taken as a basis for standardization by the inspecting committees.

It should be stated that in all accrediting, both of secondary schools and colleges, it is expected that the institution first express its desire to be accredited. In no other way could Article IV of the Constitution above cited be adhered to. In some of the earlier accrediting of high schools, through lack of familiarity with this article, some accrediting seems to have been done without consulting the wishes of the schools concerned; but it does not appear that any dissatisfaction has arisen on this account.

Somewhat aside from the general field of action of this Association has been the interest which it has taken in interscholastic athletics. Much has been accomplished, through the efforts of committees appointed to investigate conditions in this department of educational work, toward relieving this phase of physical training of the evils which have developed in connection with interscholastic games and meets.

One of the most promising fields of activity into which the Association has entered, rather as an extension of the purposes of its original organization, is its cooperation with other similar organizations in the United States. For a number of years we have thus been represented in the deliberations of the Commission on Uniform College Entrance Requirements in English, and this altogether to our credit.

A similar association has been enjoyed with the work of the College Entrance Examination Board. This association with other similar groups culminated, in 1908, in the organization of the National Conference Committee on Standards of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Merely to state the membership of this Committee will be sufficient to suggest the great significance of this movement and the far reaching benefits which may result from such a cooperative action. The membership is of delegates from the following: The New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools, The New England College Entrance Certificate Board, The Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Middle States and Maryland, The College Entrance Examination Board, The North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, The Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States, The National Association of State Universities, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and such other organizations as may be elected to membership.

Little mention has been made in this brief article of the names of those who have participated in this work. We refrain reluctantly from mentioning the long list of those who have given freely of time and thought for the furthering of the great and good pur-



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poses for which the North Central Association stands. For fuller details in this respect we must refer the reader to the published proceedings.

From an organization representing seven states the Association has grown until it now includes fourteen states in its institutional membership, and others are now knocking for admission.

Naturally people coming together as representatives of somewhat widely varying interests will hold and seek to maintain opinions often at variance. Is not the significant thing about it to be found in the fact that we do get together and deliberate, often with warmth, but always, let us believe, with the spirit of conciliation and of mutual betterment?